Castlemaine Naturalist

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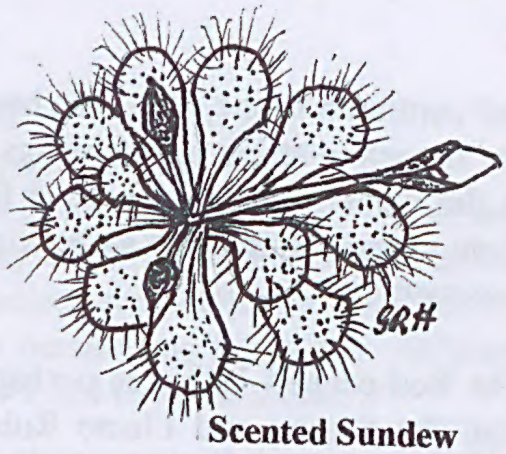


Scented Sundew
Drosera whittakeri

ATTENTION ALL BROOM PULLERS!

A good attendance and excellent effort by all those who attended on 28/5. Unfortunately the task was not quite finished and another morning working bee has been called for **Tuesday 6th September from 8am onwards** – enter through the bottom gate opp. Burnett Road. Wear sturdy footwears, gloves, hat, etc. BYO morning tea.

Local Robins

The last time I wrote an article for the newsletter, it was a bit esoteric, about a pelagic trip off Tasmania. It made me think that perhaps we need some more basic articles on the more common birds in the local area. It's a pity we can't do photos, but I will have a go at a topic and see if it is the start of something which helps some of our newer members come to terms with bird identification. My subject will be "local robins". The descriptions I will give apply to the males – the females are often much drabber in appearance. It would be useful if you read this article in conjunction with your field guide so you don't have to use too much imagination.

My field guide tells me there are 15 species of robin on the continent. Seven of these can be found in central Victoria. Probably the most common is the Eastern Yellow Robin. This is totally yellow on the front and grey on the back. It often clings to the side of tree trunks and is generally found close to the ground. Its most identifiable call is a persistent series of piping sounds, slow and mournful – similar to the call of the White-throated treecreeper.

The Scarlet Robin is marginally smaller, with a scarlet breast tapering to white before the legs. The throat and back are basically black and it has a noticeable white spot above the bill. It also has white on the wings. It can be found in the district all year round, with additional birds arriving during winter.

The Flame Robin is roughly the same size as the Scarlet Robin, but somehow appears "thicker". The front of the bird is coloured flame red – a more orange colour than the Scarlet Robin. The colouring starts immediately under the bill

and continues to the legs. The back is a greyer colour than the Scarlet, but it also has the white stripe on the wings. These birds are much more likely to be seen in the winter, when they move from the higher districts. I used to see lots of them in the autumn and early winter fifteen years ago, but they seem much less common now.

The Red-capped Robin is perhaps the most spectacular. It is slightly smaller than the Scarlet and Flame Robins and has a slimmer perspective. It has a scarlet cap and breast and a black back, with the typical white wing stripe. It has a trilling call, which can be easily identified, as well as a sharp tick. They are generally found in more northern parts, but do occasionally migrate further south.

The Hooded Robin is a black and white bird. It has a black "hood" reaching the middle of the breast and flowing all the way down the back. The rest of the bird, including a wing stripe, is coloured white. It is a relatively quiet bird and seems to be reducing in range in Victoria.

The other two robins which can be seen in the area, but much less readily, are the Rose and Pink Robins. These are small birds – similar in size to the Red-capped Robin. The breast of the Rose Robin is a deep rose-red and the colour stops in roughly the same place as the Scarlet Robin. It is a tree dwelling species and can be found more readily further north along the NSW and Southern Queensland coast. The Pink Robin has a lighter coloured breast and the colour extends further down the front of the bird – similar to the Flame Robin. This is more a bird of the scrub and can be very difficult to find. I have seen one pair on Mount Alexander several years ago.

Nigel Harland

What's the attraction of them there hills?

I've lived in the Macedon area now for 13 years. When I lived down on the flat in the Wombat State Forest out of Gisborne, I used to note how the yellow-tailed black cockatoos would disappear every winter, only to reappear in October. Since living up on the Mt Macedon (for three years now) I have noticed that we have black cockies present all year round. I also remember years ago commenting to someone who lives on Red Hill that we lose our black cockies in winter, and he replied that he only ever saw them in winter. Can one conclude from the above that they like to head for high ground in winter, I wonder? And what would be the attraction in doing so?

Bruce Donaldson

Welcome to new members: Clare Claydon and Wim Westerhoff

Lerp Insects

I knew only that lerps were an important food source for Swift Parrots and caused the stressed brown appearance of many River Red Gum communities when I read that there are "some 300 odd species, each spinning a distinctive shield" (Semmens, 2002, p.31). I went straight outside and found four different and quite beautiful casings almost immediately - I had to know more!

Lerp insects or psyllids are sap sucking insects that construct a waxy scale-like covering (lerp) under which they shelter and feed. They live in colonies of mixed species and stages of development so it is not unusual to find different species on the same leaf. Their whole life cycle takes only 1-2 months depending on the time of the year (temperature) and location and as a result most species go through several generations per year. They are mostly rare and inconspicuous but can "without any obvious regularity" (Phillips, 1992. p.1) suddenly increase in numbers and later on, disappear just as suddenly.

Life Cycle. The life cycle of all lerp insects is essentially the same. Each female lays between 45 and 700 eggs on stalks plugged into the leaf tissue. !0 –20 day later the young nymphs hatch and begin their search for a suitable place to settle on the host plant. Once settled they insert their mouthparts or "stylets" into the leaf and begin feeding. At the same time they construct a lerp to shelter beneath until they become adults.

Lerps are formed from the honeydew excreted by the psyllid. In free-living psyllids the honeydew produced remains in liquid form but in lerp insects it hardens on contact with air to form the lerp. Lerps vary enormously in size, shape and design. They may be simple cones, univalves, bivalves, intricately woven basket or fan shapes (see illustrations below). Each species has its own characteristic shape.

Nymphs pass through five stages or moults before becoming winged adults. At every moult the insect withdraws its stylets from the leaf and selects a new feeding site. The new site is usually within the existing lerp but occasionally the insect moves to a new site and constructs a new lerp. (Phillips, 1992. p.2)

Damage. Lerp insects rarely cause the death of trees but do weaken and slow their growth and cause degrees of defoliation and dieback. In this weakened state other insects may move in and attack a tree causing it to die.
Cardiospina spp. is a particularly damaging species that is prone to periodic outbreaks. These outbreaks are characterized by the unsightly brown appearance of the affected trees and can often last for 2-3 years with several cycles of leaf loss and recovery in that time.

One theory suggests that outbreaks are associated with weather induced stress in the tree – usually rainfall(either too much or too little) - which results in changes in the quality of food the insects eat. For example, drought or flooding can result in an increase in available nitrogen in the leaves and this in turn means better survival of young insects.

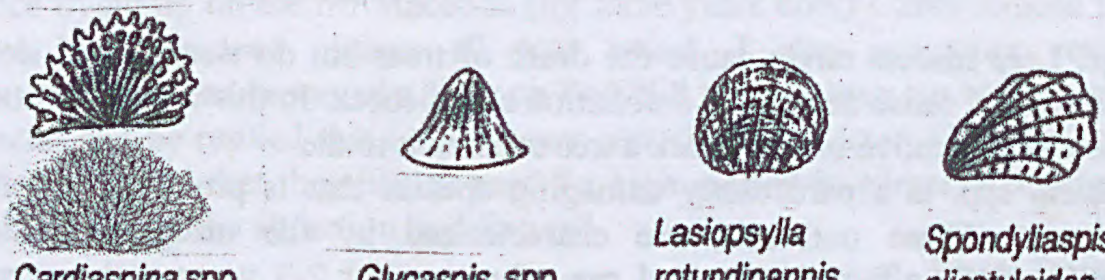
Other theories suggest outbreaks occur when certain conditions combine to provide an environment that is just right for the insect to rapidly increase in numbers. These conditions include ineffective natural control and the abundance of leaves of the right age and quality for maximum growth and survival of the insect. Seasonal conditions such as this often follow periods when the trees have already been stressed.
(Phillips, 1992. p.2)

Controlling outbreaks of lerp insects is not usually practical and may be difficult to achieve. Infestations are usually on large trees and most infestations will be adequately controlled sooner or later by natural predators such as honeyeaters, pardalotes, parrots, silvereyes, sparrows, willy-wagtails; hoverflies, ladybird beetles and lacewings; spiders, mites and lizards and/or parasites such as the tiny, black Encyrtid and Eulophid wasps.
Systemic insecticides are effective against sap sucking insects but if attacks are on very large trees spraying is not possible and trunk injections may do more damage than the insect itself.
***When deciding if control is necessary it is important to make sure that the insects are still present under the lerps – often by the time damage is noticed, the lerp insects have become adults and only the empty lerp shells remain. (Philips, 1992. p. 3)*

So look out all year round for discolouration or sooty mould on mature and young mature foliage - you may find some of these beautiful lerps and between late March and September and you may also find some Swift Parrots feeding there!

Geraldine Harris

Common Lerp Insects found on Native Plants



Cardiaspina spp. *Glycaspis* spp. *Lasiopsylla rotundipennis* *Spondyliaspis plicatuloides*

References:
Semmens, J. 2002. *Bush Seasons – An affectionate study of a tiny bushland.* Hyland House Publishing Pty. Ltd. Flemmington, Vic.
Phillips C. 1996. *Forest Health Sheet 6 - Lerp Insects.* Forestry SA (Online, accessed 19 Aug. 2005.)

Postcard from Mt. Gundabooka N.P. – 4/8/05

We are still observing.....

We've travelled up the Darling River. Monday 1st, we camped at the Wilga Campground (Paroo-Darling N.P.) on the river. John heard scuffling in the night. On investigation, four echidnas in a train!! Well, that is the type of report we were trying to find on our Earthwatch trip to Kangaroo Island.

Now at Mt. Gundabooka N.P. – ridge covered with crimson Eremophila. Saw pair of red-capped robins. Spotted on the Darling – Mulga Parrots and plenty of Eastern Ringnecks. Regards to all, Nina and John (Cole).

Swift Parrots

During the recent National Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Survey approximately forty Swift Parrots were recorded in the Muckleford area.

At Barkers Creek at Harris's and along Hagues Road the number of Swift Parrots has increased again. The birds are feeding mainly in Grey Box trees.

Debbie Worland has patiently recorded some excellent video footage of Swift Parrot activities at the Golf Course and members will be treated with selected pieces at the December Meeting.

What's New on the Web

Swift Parrots (Animals)

Beating the Castlemaine Boundaries Excursion 13/8/05 (Locations)

The Use of Milk Cartons for Plant Protection. (Opinions/Issues)

Observations

- At the top end of Blakeley Road Doug Mills noticed tufts of fur and scratch marks along the ground for about 50 metres – probably the sight of a contest between two adult male **kangaroos**. A day or so later all the fur had disappeared – but he suspects there might be some well-lined birds nests about this season!
- A **Black-shouldered Kite** has been making regular daily appearances over Happy Valley. Maureen Dredge
- Dot Henshaw watched a pair of **Letter-winged Kites** investigating a pine tree for 20 – 30 minutes at McKenzies Hill.
- Bill van Smeerdijk is looking for ways to deter a **Kookaburra** that is attacking windows at his house – the attacks are so noisy and aggressive that one window has been broken and Bill would like a solution before it starts on the other 80 panes! (Suggestions put forward included smiley faces, fishing line, and taped bird calls.)
- **31/7 Wombat Forest Walk** – Downy Grevillea (*Grevillea alpina)*, Trailing Goodenia (*Goodenia lanata)*, Common Heath (*Epacris impressa)*, Spike Wattle (*Acacia oxcedrus*), Narrow-leaf Wattle *(Acacia mucronata var*

longifolia), Bushy Needlewood (*Hakea decurrens ssp physocaarpa)*, Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata)*. Richard Piesse

- **7/8 Heron's Reef** – Tall Greenhoods (*Pterostylis melagramma*), Dwarf Greenhoods (*Pterostylis nana*), and Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha)*. Richard Piesse
- **Parrots** are picking all the flowers off the correa bushes so they can get to the tasty morsel of nectar at the back of the flower. Anne van Gemert
- Golden Moths (*Diuris chryseopsis)*, Common Hovea (*Hovea heterophylla*), Scented Sundews (*Drosera whittakeri ssp aberanns)* and Tiny Stars (*Hypoxis sp)* in **flower at Barkers Creek**. Geraldine Harris
- Wood Ducks investigating the Perkins chimney. Ern Perkins
- 24/8 The **blue-tongued lizard** was sunning itself at Broadways. George B.
- 22/8 Creek flowing and lake full in **Botanic Gardens** – all but a few Wood Ducks have eventually disappeared.
- One hundred **Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos** in gum trees in Blanket Gully Rd. Brian McCormick.
- **Mandurang** – lots of plants ready to flower for our September excusion. Downy Grevillea (*G. Alpina*), Goldfields Grevillea (*G. dryophylla*),Dwarf Greenhood (*Pterostylis nana*), Fairy Wax-flower (*Philotheca verrucosa*), Leopard Orchid (*Diuris pardina*) and acacias flowering. Richard Piesse
- Pair of **Kookaburras** nesting in former galahs' hollow – attacking entrance perhaps to make it larger and having a dispute with pair of ravens. Rita Mills.
- Boronia Gully, Irishtown – lots of **Boronia** and lots of buds ready to bloom. Hans van Gemert.
- **Tubal Cain Mine /Stoney Gully** – Hovea, Common Heath, and seven out of the eight local wattles in flower. Richard Piesse.
- Three **Crimson Rosellas** on front lawn in the evening digging – perhaps for onion weed? Athol Dorman

From the Business Meeting 28/7/05

- **Subcommittee to meet** at Perkins' to consider Draft Management Plan for the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park – Mon 5 Sept 9am.
- **Mt Alexander Planning Scheme – Amendment C24 - Public Hearing** Campbells Creek Community Centre, Elizabeth St. Campbells Creek. Members are invited to attend to support those appearing before the panel.

Tues 13 Sept.	2.45pm-3.15pm	Castlemaine Landcare Group	(20mins)
	3.30pm-5.30pm	Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club	(1.5hrs)
Wed 14 Sept.	10.00am- 12.00	Friends of Box Ironbark Forest	(2 hrs)
	2.15pm-2.30pm	Debbie Worland	(5 mins)

- Ideas sought for CFNC **30th anniversary in 2006**. Bring ideas to Sept. meeting.

For Your Diary

Thur 8 Sept – Sun 9 Oct. Spring in the Bendigo Bush 2005.

Thur 8th Sept. - Local Orchids by Rod Orr at Newstead Landcare Group's monthly meeting at Newstead Community Centre 8-9 p.m.

Sun 11 Sept. Farewell BBQ lunch for Margaret Dunn. Members are invited to BYO everything (including chairs & small salad to share (opt.)) to 337 Sinclair Lane, Walmer to farewell Margaret who is moving to Melbourne. Time 12.30-1pm. Contact: Dorothy Wright 5475 1257.

Sun 11 Sept. Free train ride to Community Planting Day.
Muckleford Landcare BYO lunch and tools. Drinks provided. Train departs Maldon 10.05am and returns approx. 5 pm. Contact: Brett Tyler – 5474 2875.

Sun 18 Sept. Fo BIB. Expedition Pass Reservoir - easy 4km walk. 5472 2892

Sun 25 Sept. Friends of Kalimna – Working Bee. Ph 5472 2892

Fri 30 Sep – Sun 2 Oct. VNPA Base Camp- Terrrick Terrick NP.
Activities, including night spotlighting to find Plains Wanderer and wildflower walks, to establish a different kind of monitoring work for Parkmates. Contact: Prue Simmons Ph (03) 9347 5188.

Sept 30 –Oct 7 Birds Australia Congress - Bendigo.
Contact, C Morris. Ph. 9885 4221 or Ern Perkins Ph 5472 3124

Fri 7 Oct.– , *Ballarat FNC,* Annual Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture. ***Otway Dreaming*** **-Trevor Pescott**, renowned author and photographer from Geelong FNC Contact Carol Hall 5339 2777.

Thur 3 – Mon 7 Nov. Warrnambird '05. 4 days of birding in south-west Vic., Some members attending. Contact: Ken Dredge 5470 6474.

Articles Welcome - Articles, reports and observations can be left at Tonks Bros. in Barkers St. or sent to Geraldine Harris, P.O.Box 703, Castlemaine, 3450. Ph. 5474 2244, or gedharris@castlemaine.net Please submit articles by the fourth Thursday of the month.

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

Subscriptions for 2005
Ordinary membership: Single $22, Family $30
Pensioner or student: Single $19, Family $24
The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist.*

Newstead Wildlife Shelter – Barry and Dawn Angus

EMERGENCY NUMBERS 5476 2580 or 0428 571 752

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme – September 2005

General meetings (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.
Excursions (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the carpark opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.
Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at 27 Doveton Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.
VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS.

Fri 9 Sept.. The Alpine National Park. Phil Ingamells. Phil is the Alpine (anti-grazing) Campaigner for the Victorian National Parks Association and a former member of the CFNC. UCA hall at 8pm.
Sat 10 Sept. Mandurang – Bendigo National Park. Leaders: R. Piesse/ R. Mills. Depart from carpark opp. motel in Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp.
Wednesday Evening Wildflower Walks. All these walks depart from carpark, opp. motel in Duke St. at 4pm sharp and return at 5.30pm. Contact G. Harris.
Wed 14 Sept. Walk (1). Sinclair Lane, Walmer. M Dunn/ Dorothy Wright
Wed 21 Sept. Walk (2). Barkers Creek Reserve. Rita Mills
Wed 28 Sept. Walk (3). The Monk. George Broadway
Wed 5 Oct. Walk (4). Claypits, Blanket Gully Rd. Richard Piesse
Wed 12 Oct. Walk (5). Courts Hill Track. Michael Kennedy/G. Harris
Fri 14 Oct. Box-Ironbark Forests. – Ern Perkins. UCA hall at 8pm.
Sat 15 Oct– Sun 16 Oct. Three Excursions with Ringwood FNC. All are subject to revision – check the October newsletter. Ern Perkins. 54723124.

Sat am. Muckleford Forest and Red White and Blue Mine
Sat pm. The Monk , Fryerstown and Vaughan
Sun am and pm. Elphinstone and Taradale

Fri 11 Nov. November Meeting. Speaker to be confirmed.
Sat 12 Nov. Wewak Track/ Porcupine Ridge. Richard Piesse 54723191.
Fri 9 Dec. Member night. 8pm at UCA hall.

2005 Committee

Rita Mills (Pres).....Ph. 5472 4553 George Broadway (Sec)..Ph. 5472 2513
Hans van Gemert (Treas)Ph. 5472 1082 Richard Piesse.....Ph.5472 3191
Ern Perkins (Web).....Ph. 5472 3124 Athol Dorman.....Ph. 5472 4429
Nigel Harland.....Ph. 5474 8246 Chris Morris .....Ph. 9885 4221
Geraldine Harris (Ed)..Ph. 5474 2244, gedharris@castlemaine.net

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